

Increasing Our Comfort Level - Vanessa Iverson

I have some teachers who are fearful of coming across the wrong way, whether it be not quite understanding our culture, and then saying the wrong thing, or otherwise just not feeling comfortable at all teaching it because, you know, I've had lots of people say, well, I'm not Native so I don't know how to teach it, or I'm not Native and I don't feel comfortable teaching it. So that's probably been one of our biggest obstacles, is getting teachers to feel comfortable if they are not Native to be able to implement the understanding in their classroom.

And so, you know, one of the things I try to tell them is that if we can go in with an open heart and an open mind, and we are gentle and we put our defenses aside, anything can be talked about. And whether that means we don't have a solid background on the topic, we can still listen. And if we compassionately listen without always having to think what we're going to say next, that's how we're going to accomplish stuff. And so that's how we've had to try and approach it with the teachers, starting there.

Just getting them to learn about themselves and their biases, and how they can implement the understandings within themselves, just simply that way. Because there's so many underlying things in them, just simple things like learning to listen, being kind to others, and then the cultural stuff can just flow. So that's probably one of the biggest things, if I can give any advice to schools who are struggling with implementation, or maybe they're dominantly a white school, getting them to come from a place of understanding first.

Because if you go right in with trying to, this happened, this happened, this happened, obviously our defenses go up. So we have to learn ways to approach it gently, and have a liaison, someone who can talk gently, someone who can come from both perspectives in the beginning, instead of just one-sided.